

February 15, 2017

"Dear Appropriations Committee,

I am concerned about the proposed FY 2018-19 Governor's Budget because it would:

- Continue the cuts from this year (FY 2017) which resulted in a 45% cut in seasonal workers, closure of 3 campgrounds, and reductions in services for the public across the state.
- Cut the Community Investment Act by 50% and divert funds from open space protection, farmland preservation, affordable housing, historic preservation, and a safety net for dairy farmers.
- Eliminate the Council on Environmental Quality, a lean, effective environmental watchdog state agency.
- Reduce Department of Energy & Environmental Protection professionals by another 24 positions when DEEP has already lost over 200 positions over the past decade.

Continuing to cut the budget for DEEP is undermining its critical role of protecting State Parks and Forests, the waters of the State, air quality, wildlife, and generally safeguarding Connecticut's quality of life. My son and I have spent countless hours at Chatfield Hollow, Devils Hopyard, Hammonasset, Kent Falls and Sleeping Giant, to name a few. Walking and hiking through our state parks are a way for him and me to connect and to find quiet time in an increasingly fretful and anxious time.

State Parks provide more than \$1 billion/year and support more than 9,000 jobs and are worth the investment (every \$1 invested in the Parks returns \$38 to Connecticut's coffers). The great value that State Parks and Forests provide to Connecticut can be lost if they continue to be cut and neglected.

Last year, my mentally ill brother Ed spent several months healing in Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) in Middletown. As his older sister and conservator, I requested and received frequent day passes to get my brother outside the hospital environment. We hiked through Wadsworth Falls State Park and Millers Pond State Pond on several occasions. For his birthday, we hiked the trails at Gillette Castle and sat on the bank of the Connecticut River. Ed was homeless for 25 years and lived outside. He decided in the fall of 2015 to say 'yes' to help and healing. The walks in the woods through the state parks were a salve for his soul, and mine. He hugged trees and would stop frequently and put his hand on the bark – like he was reassuring a friend. We spoke very little while walking in the woods and we would leave our time rejuvenated, calmer, solid and centered. While it is important to cite the costs associated with maintaining our state park system, the benefits for people like me, my son and my brother are incalculable.

I am asking the Committee to take the following actions: 1) support a dedicated, non-lapsing account where revenues generated by DEEP can be used to hire seasonal workers, maintain State Parks, and provide critical public services; and 2) support ideas such as the Passport to the Parks which generate NEW revenues to offset the proposed cuts. Connecticut and our state parks are a well-kept secret. I would love to see a state-wide creative community project that brings people together to "tell us why you live here." Perhaps this could generate some press, and tourists, and help to offset some of our state's budget woes.

Please see attached booklet showing my brother's healing journey enhanced by his time in the woods.

Sincerely,
Laura Noe, Branford